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AUTHOR Boloz, Sigmund A.; Lincoln, Dorothea C.
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ABSTRACT

Ganado Primary School on the Navajo Reservation has formulated and implemented an attendance improvement plan which has provided encouraging results. Formulation and implementation of the attendance improvement plan were initiated after reviewing the 1980 attendance registers which indicated the average length of enrollment had been 169 days with students averaging 11 days of absences. An attendance task force was formed to study the problem and to recommend possible solutions for improvement. Recommendations included: identifying high risk students and interviewing their parents to determine their perception of the importance of attending school; undertaking a district-wide effort to reduce factors contributing to frequent absenteeism; and implementing a positive program. The program was designed to recognize both individual and class groups for outstanding attendance records which included a monthly invitation to a special movie; in 9 weeks receiving a ribbon of recognition; and for the year presented with a "Ganado Attendance Star" T-shirt and a certificate at an assembly. At the end of the first year of the attendance program, 22% of the student body accounted for 40% of all absences averaging 9 absences per year and by the end of the third year absences ranged from 3.9% to 2.5%. (ERB)

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COMBATING STUDENT ABSENTEEISM: STRATEGIES FOR RAISING ATTENDANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

by

Sigmund A. Boloz

and

Dorothea C. Lincoln

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Ganado Public Schools

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COMBATING STUDENT ABSENTEEISM:
STRATEGIES FOR RAISING ATTENDANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

Sigmund A. Boloz and Dorothea C. Lincoln

Historically, absenteeism has been the primary source of anxiety for the rural school administrator. While many plans have been designed to impact this attendance crisis, few districts have successfully maximized enrollment. Ganado Primary School in its attempt to decrease absenteeism has formulated and implemented an attendance improvement plan which has provided encouraging results and which has positive implications for its adaptation into similar programming in other schools.

Located on the Navajo Reservation, the public school's initial attendance registers of 1980 indicated a high rate of absenteeism. However, since no organized data existed with which to compare the 1980 figures, few implications for programming could be drawn. Therefore, the development of an attendance needs assessment became paramount.

Under the direction of the building principal, the Primary School office staff first examined data collection within the district. Two types of data collection were readily available: the district compiled monthly registers, which compared schools and grades; and the local school attendance records, which listed individual student histories.

The Primary School's attendance data was then extrapolated and organized to provide a profile of the previous year's monthly attendance

average for each grade. A comparison of the first two district monthly registers found that the absence rate had increased by fifteen percent above the previous year. This initial phase of the attendance needs assessment had provided the school's staff with the first meaningful data from which the directionality of the program and attendance goals could be established.

GANADO PRIMARY SCHOOL
1979-80 School Year
Absence Rate by Register Month
and Grade

Register Month	KINDERGARTEN		FIRST		SECOND		THIRD		TOTAL K-3
	Present	Absent	Present	Absent	Present	Absent	Present	Absent	
1	1311	54	1918	55	1889.5	60.5	1787	43	
2	1584	101	2429	126	2376	131	2179	122	
3	1653	104	2518	197	2561	133	2275.5	137.5	
4	1399	131	2159	159	2114	150	1890	130	
5	894	29	1309	51	1229	71	1124	56	
ST	6.796	419	10,333	588	10,169.5	545.5	9255.5	488.5	36,554 / 2,041
	6.17%		5.7%		5.37%		5.28%		5.59%
6	1674	152	2508	235	2508.5	130.5	2154	213	
7	1443	88	2181.5	152.5	2086.5	132.5	1827	128	
8	1273	73	1922	133	1790.5	159.5	1612	113	
9	1682.5	94.5	2569.5	159.5	2435	180	2169	151	
10	1656	107	2619	141	2452.5	167.5	2215	107	
11	146	30	235	41	229	33	206	26	
TOTAL	14,670.5	963.5	22,368	1450	21,442.5	1348.5	19,438.5	1226.5	77,919.5 /4988
	6.57%		6.49%		6.29%		6.31%		6.01%

In October of 1980, an attendance task force was formed to study the problem and to recommend possible solutions for improvement. The task force expanded the needs assessment to establish: (1) individual attendance frequencies, including monthly and yearly averages by grade; and (2) chronic non-attenders. Although individual data was only available for the

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previous year's kindergarten, first and second grade students, it was found that the average length of enrollment had been one hundred and sixty-nine days with the students averaging eleven days of absences. Finally, thirty-two students were targeted as chronic, as they had each averaged thirty-one of absences. This data established a base line from which progress towards attendance goals could be measured. Examining the data the Task Force recommended: (1) that identified high risk students and their parents be interviewed to determine their perception of the relative importance of attending school; (2) that a district-wide effort be undertaken to reduce those factors listed as contributing to frequent absenteeism; and (3) that positive programming be implemented.

It was obvious that the school lacked attendance traditions, so during October, the Task Force expanded to include representatives of the K-3 student body. The members of the Primary School Library-Activity Club, a club similar to a student council, met jointly with staff members and designed a system of incentives to recognize both individual and class groups for outstanding attendance records. Individuals with perfect attendance during: (1) any month, were invited to a view a special movie; (2) any nine weeks, received a ribbon of recognition; and (3) the year, were presented with a "Ganado Attendance Star" T-shirt and a certificate at an assembly.

Group incentives recognized classrooms. The classroom in each grade with the best monthly attendance average also attended the film. At year's end, the one classroom with

the best average took a field trip and received T-shirts. Finally, all classrooms with no absences were recognized daily over the school's intercom. School attendance traditions were instituted through a system of charts noting the best: (1) monthly attendance average in each grade; (2) the ten top classes to date, as the year progressed; and (3) the year's top ten. These averages established further baselines for which the following year's classrooms would strive.

As the incentive program's effectiveness manifested itself the principal observed that attendance was lowest on Fridays. Consequently, the task force took steps to focus attention on Friday attendance. This was done by presenting the class with no absences on Friday and the best weekly attendance with the honor of raising the building flags for the following week. This incentive was effective and by the end of the second month of the program, absences had decrease by thirty-seven percent.

Data collection became a concern. The system of incentives was easily financed; however, the data involved in the distribution of ribbons itself, was awesome. In gathering the previous year's attendance frequencies, individual files were reviewed and many hours of data collection were expended. While the school's attendance clerk could maintain records concerning classrooms and student attendance, a new collection format was designed to summarize the individual histories.

TEACHER: _____ ROOM: _____ GRADE: _____

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM FOR EACH CHILD WHO IS NOW IN YOUR ROOM.
1982-83

P = Days Present A = Days Absent

	NAME	9wks P	9wks A	18wks P	18wks A	27wks P	27wks A	36wks P	36wks A	TOTAL P	TOTAL A
1.											
2.											
3.											
4.											
5.											
6.											
7.											
8.											
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28.											
29.											
30.											

PLEASE RETURN THIS TO THE OFFICE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

To collect the data, teachers were asked to transfer from report cards, the information which indicated the number of days present and absent on a quarterly basis throughout the year. In this format, the data could be analyzed and quickly information concerning school patterns of attendance was made available.

At the end of the first year of the attendance program, twenty-two percent of the study body accounted for forty-nine

percent of all absences, and those students now averaged nine absences per year. This data also identified certain family and geographic groups as the most likely non-attenders. The lowest ten percent of the students, who averaged twenty-seven days of absences were labeled as chronic. The second year's data revealed that sixteen percent of the student body, with twenty or more days absent, accounted for forty-three percent of the total absences of the school, while the average student missed six days.

It was evident that the school lacked a consistent intervention program. Therefore, a strategy was established which included a series of consequences implemented to prevent a student from missing twenty days. Consequences included: (1) parental contacts by mail; (2) home visits by liasons; (3) home visits by the principal and the social service worker; and (4) a final parent conference in the school with the child being put on academic probation. In order to implement the consequences consistently, the daily attendance form was modified to include the number of days the student had accumulated to date, regardless of the type of absence. From this information the school attendance clerk initiates the Intervention Form and implements the appropriate intervention.

GANADO PRIMARY SCHOOL
GANADO, ARIZONA 86505

DATE: _____

Dear Parents:

Your child, _____ has come to the attention of my office for the following actions:

ABSENCES

☐ 1. All students are required to bring a note from home after being absent from school.

☐ 2. Parents must be aware that absences, excused or unexcused, in excess of twenty (20) days are considered excessive and may result in the recommendation for the student's retention in that grade.

NOTE: Your child has missed _____ days so far this year.

☐ After five (5) days cumulative absence, the parents will be contacted by letter;

☐ After ten (10) days cumulative absence, the parents will be contacted by letter and a home visit will be made;

☐ After fifteen (15) days cumulative absence, a home visit shall be made and a conference will be scheduled at the school;

☐ After twenty (20) days cumulative absence, a home visit shall be made a conference will be scheduled at the school and the child may be retained in the grade at the end of the school year.

NOTE: Extended illness of family problems or multi-day absences will be treated on an individual basis.

TARDINESS

☐ Your child was reported as tardy today _____. Tardiness without satisfactory explanation shall be grounds for disciplinary action and parents will be notified.

Please speak to your child about this. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to schedule a conference with me or to call me at (602) 755-3436.

Sincerely,

PARENT: Sign on line below and return

Sigmund A. Bolor, Principal
Primary School

_____

As of December of the third year of the attendance program, absences were at an all-time low. They ranged from a high of 3.9 percent in the Third Grade to a low of 2.5 percent in the Second Grade. Also, only three liason visits have been necessary. This was a vast improvement over the 5.6 percent absence rate from the year prior to the implementation of the attendance program.

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CONCLUSION:

Absenteeism has been and will continue to be a primary source of anxiety for the rural school administrator. However, the problem can be addressed effectively and efficiently. Ganado Primary School has adopted a scientific model in combating absenteeism and has had encouraging results. The Program advocates: (1) the development of a comprehensive needs assessment from which program directionality, in the form of goals, is established; (2) the implementation of an attendance task force; and (3) the development of school-wide attendance traditions.

Although school districts vary in their locations, populations, and resources, they can not be effective if the students do not attend consequently. The school system desiring to improve attendance must thoroughly examine its past as well as its present attendance underachievement.